

Welcome to our fifth week of Shaping the Future of Work. My name is Christine Riordan, and I am a PhD student here at the Institute for Work and Employment Research at MIT. I'm filling in for Professor Kochan this morning, who you will hear from later in the week.

There are two items that we want to highlight as we start this week of the course. One is our upcoming topic regarding worker voice and good quality jobs in the context of changing forms of work. The second is something we're really excited about, which is a simulated negotiation over the future social contract at work, something that you will be participating in next week, and which really brings all of the ideas and this course together in a very concrete way. So this week, we're going to get you set up for that negotiation.

But first, our focus on worker voice and advocacy. So last week, we heard from a number of individuals about new arrangements and forms of work, whether it be new patterns of job growth, the organization of work through technology, or new strategies in entrepreneurship. From the discussion boards, these seem to be topics that resonate with your thinking about the future of work, not only in terms of your own jobs or careers, but also in the bigger picture of the labor market. Within this realm, the issue of job quality is front and center.

So these two things, changing forms of work and good employment practices, are critical to our upcoming module on worker voice and advocacy. We're going to extend this discussion to consider how worker voice and organizing are changing as new forms of organizing work are emerging. To do so, we're going to first discuss the decline in union membership, a traditional means of exercising voice on the job. We'll identify some of the ways in which new work arrangements are challenging voice and job quality. We'll then talk about how new forms of worker organizing are starting to adapt to these changes and challenges. Firms, as we'll see, are also making decisions on how they integrate new ways of doing work, such as those brought by technology, in ways that maintain good job standards.

However, we want to take a moment to emphasize an important point that puts these discussions in a broader context. In a number of our videos and discussions, we've talked about alternative work arrangements such as freelancing or contracting, and on-demand, or gig, jobs.

According to a recent study by US economists Lawrence Katz and Alan Krueger, such alternative arrangements have grown, most notably in the last 10 years, and now account for about 15% of workers' jobs throughout the US. This growth in the visibility of arrangements like those of the on-demand economy are bringing renewed attention to related labor market challenges. Still, some of these arrangements make up a relatively small portion of jobs. The on-demand economy, for instance, accounted for less than 1% of total employment in 2015, according to Katz and Krueger.

So given this, there are really two tasks at hand in this week's agenda. One, as we've stated, is to understand emerging forms of voice that overcome some of the challenges in these arrangements. In our videos and Additional Resource section, you'll see inspiring examples and accounts of how change is being achieved.

The second task is to critically examine what these new challenges are telling us about the overall labor market. Encouragingly, we have arrived at a point where we are engaging in public discourse about issues like the rights of independent contractors with on-demand companies like Uber or TaskRabbit. One way to think about this discourse is that it provides a window, or a way in, to thinking about the challenges found throughout the labor market and experienced by workers across the board, whether in an alternative arrangement or not.

So given this, the question we ask becomes, how can we take the ideas and the proposals and lessons we learned from these emerging forms and use those to think critically about solutions to challenges and the need for a stronger role of worker voice across different segments of the labor market, like those discussed by Bureau of Labor Statistics chief economist Heidi Shierholz last week? Doing so places our thinking in the trajectory we've been on throughout this course, which has focused in recent weeks on the gradual demise of labor market institutions and the social contract at work. We're excited to see how you're thinking about these in the discussion boards over the coming week.

Now, on to the negotiation exercise. In week six, you'll be engaging with your course colleagues in dialogue regarding different actions and employment practices that can serve as building blocks for the new social contract at work. To do this, you'll be assigned to groups and will negotiate from the perspective of a given role, including management, labor unions and professional groups, the federal government, or educational institutions. The idea behind this is to bring all of our lessons and material together in a concrete way, but one that hinges on your creativity and participation. So the outcome of the exercise is really dependent upon having as many perspectives and participants as possible.

This week, you're given basic information and instructions for the negotiation. You're also asked to sign up for the exercise and fill out a short preparation survey. We encourage all of you, whether you're taking the class for a certificate or not, to participate so that we can collectively really make the most out of this opportunity to think creatively about the issues we care about.

Next week, you'll receive your role and your group assignments, and we'll start your negotiations. On our discussion board, you'll notice a new thread entitled "Negotiation Exercise" where this week and next, you can post questions or let us know if you need assistance. We hope that you'll join us for the exercise, and for a live event presentation in week seven, the details of which we'll post soon. There we'll talk about your plans for action. So stay tuned. s

